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## THE USE OF BUSINESS METHODS AS A MEANS OF IDENTIFYING NEEDS OF THE DEAF

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### INTRODUCTION

Non-profit service organizations, such as community service centers for the deaf, can adopt business methods to improve their overall operation. Business firms have developed these methods over the years to address key issues such as: "What goals should the organization attempt to achieve?", "What resources will be needed to meet these goals?", and "How will we determine the degree of success we are realizing in meeting our goals?" There is no real reason why these same methods cannot be just as rewarding when used by a non-profit service organization. In fact, there are numerous examples of successful application by non-profit organizations of all types (Daft, 1978; Kotler, 1975; Ryan, 1980; Selby, 1978).

A community center for the deaf is not essentially different from an industrial firm. Both the center and the firm are comprised of an accumulation of resources under the leadership of a management team. While the firm usually has more resources, the resources are of the same general type — facilities, materials, machines, money, and people. These resources are assembled to create a product or perform a service needed by people or groups of people located in the area that the organization serves. The organization has been created by some person or persons to satisfy these needs. In the case of the business firm, a profit is expected. For the center, it is anticipated that the value of the services will equal or exceed their cost.

Managers of non-profit organizations should take advantage of the methods developed by their business counterparts. The past twenty or so years have seen business man-

agers adopt more and more "scientific" techniques to accompany the ingredients of experience, ingenuity, and common sense. One such technique, which provides an overall framework into which a number of other techniques can be fitted, is known as the "systems approach."

### THE SYSTEMS APPROACH

The systems approach is intended to provide an orderly, systematic process that a manager can follow in solving problems (McLeod, 1979; pp. 83-99). The problem need not be restricted to things that are going wrong, but can also include opportunities that should be seized and exploited. The term, systems approach, generally refers to a systems orientation on the part of the problem solver and a sequence of steps to be followed.

#### Viewing the Organization as a System

A system can be regarded as a group of integrated elements with the common purpose of achieving some objective (McLeod, 1979, pp. 8-9). When an organization is viewed as a system, the elements are the human, material, and money resources, and the objective is to provide products and/or services. The system is comprised of subsystems, such as departmental units, and exists within a larger environment, along with other systems such as the federal government, banks, suppliers, and the like.

#### Problem Solving Steps

System problems can be identified and solved by following six steps:

1. Define the problem

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2. Gather data to understand the problem
3. Identify alternatives
4. Evaluate alternatives
5. Select the best alternative
6. Implement the solution and follow-up

These steps of the systems approach essentially boil down to "understand the problem before you attempt to solve it, and consider all of the alternatives." For this reason, perhaps only the name is new, and the name means nothing more than "good management" (Dearden, 1972).

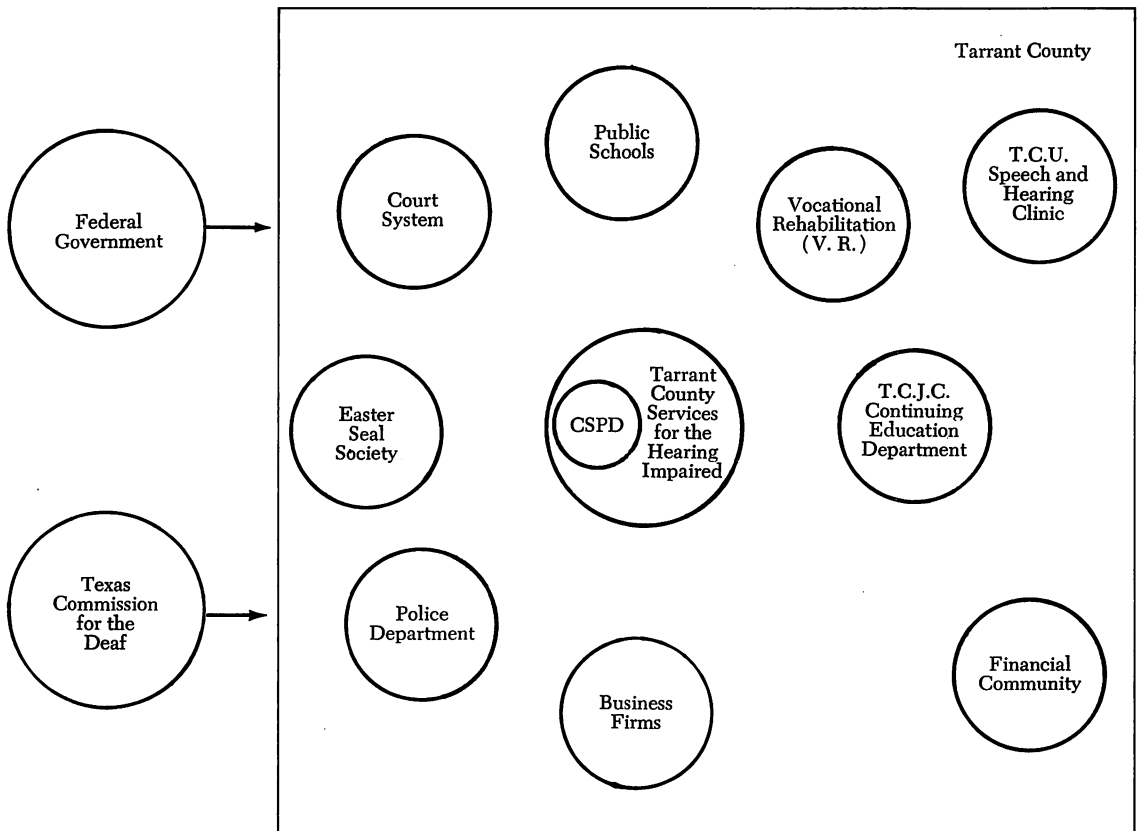
### CSPD As a System

The Community Service Program for the Deaf (CSPD), Fort Worth, Texas, can be

viewed as a system. CSPD was founded in 1975 by the Tarrant County Services for the Hearing Impaired (TCSHI) and was given the responsibility of providing services to the deaf of the county. With a 1977 county population of 779,800, the potential market for CSPD's services consists of approximately 6,800 deaf persons based on a ratio of 873 deaf persons per 100,000 population (Schein & Delk, 1974, p. 16).

The CSPD system is a subsystem within a larger system — Tarrant County. CSPD must interact with other subsystems in this environment, as shown in Figure 1. The overall environment, including the other subsystems, imposes constraints on CSPD that influence the manner in which objectives are achieved.

**FIGURE 1**  
**CSPD AND ITS ENVIRONMENT**



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CSPD has undergone significant changes during its short life span. The most apparent changes are those of the physical system — the building and its fixtures. An older home provided the initial facilities, but a well-equipped modern brick structure, the Goodrich Center for the Deaf, was dedicated in 1977. Less apparent has been the effort to refine the goals and objectives that CSPD is to achieve.

### A SEARCH FOR A PRODUCT LINE

Organizations select some area of specialization and attempt to meet a variety of needs that fall within that area. A product and service mix is used to meet unique needs within the selected area and new products are added and obsolete products are deleted over time as situations change. A service center for the deaf is faced with the same decisions relating to its offering of services, continually adjusting the mix to meet changing needs.

Many organizations offer products and services based on intuition. For the business firm, bottom-line profit is a good indicator of the adequacy of the offering. For a service center the issue is less direct. Just because there is a good response to a center's services does not mean that all is well. There may be groups within the area who need help and are not getting it. This problem is especially critical for a center for the deaf because of the diffusion of the deaf population throughout the community and the lack of information on exactly where those population members are located.

### THE SYSTEMS APPROACH AT CSPD

In 1976, CSPD took advantage of an opportunity for a marketing research class at a local university (Texas Christian University or T. C. U.) to accomplish a survey of several deaf-related groups in the county to define their needs.

Since the university students had little previous experience with deaf persons, the first half of the course included an orientation to deafness provided by guest speakers, a film, and a review of the Schein and Delk

survey. By midterm, the students had learned enough to embark on the project.

### DEFINE THE PROBLEM

The problem had been defined by the CSPD director and the TCSHI board of directors, with help from the instructor. Briefly stated, the problem was "an inability to efficiently and effectively apply CSPD resources to meet the needs of the deaf community." The main reason that the board feared a mismatch between resources and needs was the fact that they were not really certain what the needs were. The board knew that there were many deaf persons in the county who had made no contact with CSPD and the board feared that these persons had needs that were not being met. Perhaps no problem existed, but there was a shortage of information and this shortage made it difficult for management to do its job.

In agreeing to the survey, the board had mixed feelings. Perhaps more harm than good could come from "reminding" members of the deaf community of their needs. This situation would be especially bad if CSPD were then unable to respond. On the other hand, the idea of thirty college students making personal contacts throughout the county to increase the visibility of CSPD offered some real advantages. The opportunity for added visibility won out and the target groups to be surveyed were identified.

### The Market Segments

The idea of dividing an overall market into subgroups, each with unique needs, is a widely-practiced marketing strategy (DeLozier & Woodside, 1978; Pride & Ferrell, 1980; Rewoldt, Scott, & Warshaw, 1977). The idea is to identify a group with similar needs that can be satisfied with a common product or service. Target marketing is a "rifle", rather than "shotgun", approach — particularly well-suited for organizations with limited resources.

The CSPD director and the instructor decided to identify five or six segments; that was the most that the students could handle,

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working in teams of 5 to 7 students. After some discussion, the following segments were identified:

- Deaf parents
- Hearing parents of deaf children
- Deaf employees and their employers
- Employers in general
- Deaf senior citizens

The two parent groups have different needs, and represent separate market segments. The employees and their employers actually represent two segments, but it was decided to treat them as one since their needs are interrelated, and the students could interview both parties while in a particular company. Local employers were included even though it was realized that they are typically serviced by V. R. The senior citizens had virtually selected themselves by their enthusiastic response to the recreation services that had been offered. However, nobody had formally polled the senior citizens in an attempt to identify additional service needs.

### GATHER DATA TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

Although the field of marketing research is over fifty years old, little effort has been made to consider the special problems of researching the deaf population. Marketers might mistakenly believe that deaf persons could respond to a standard mail questionnaire, for example, without recognizing the limited vocabulary of many deaf persons. This is not to say that a mail survey would not work, but the unique abilities of the survey sample would have to be considered when designing the questions and evaluating the results.

In addition to mail surveys, information can also be gathered by telephone survey, personal interview, observation, and experimentation. For the CSPD research, it was decided to use personal interviews for all segments since it is the most flexible method — facilitating two-way communication. For the deaf parents and deaf employees, the students would ask the questions and an interpreter would sign the question and orally report the response to the students. For the

senior citizens, it was decided that the respondents would be more relaxed if the students were not present. Therefore, the interpreter both signed the questions and recorded the responses.

The interpreters were expected to be alert to misinterpretations and, when necessary, to rephrase questions without changing their content. An effort was made to assign interpreters to market groups who had experience in working with members of those groups.

### Questionnaire Design

The first task for each team was to learn more about their market segment. For this purpose several members of a segment were identified and contacted for “get acquainted” meetings. These conversations were informal and the respondents were encouraged to “open up” and tell the students their problems. CSPD provided interpreters for the discussion sessions involving deaf respondents. At the conclusion of these meetings, the students were able to devise questionnaires that could be presented to other persons in the segment. In all, six such questionnaires were prepared. The team studying employers of the deaf prepared two questionnaires — one for the employers and one for employees. All other teams prepared a single questionnaire.

### Data Gathering

In marketing research, it is common practice to randomly select a sample from a population. A random selection was not feasible for four of the market segments because of the small population size, or, more accurately, the small population size that had been identified by CSPD. Perhaps a segment was large, but CSPD did not know where all of the segment members were located. The only group that was large enough to justify a random selection was the employers in general. Thirty firms were selected randomly from a list of those employing 100 or more people. The information gathered from these selected firms can be assumed to represent all such firms in the county. The

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same assumption cannot be made for the other groups — that information must be used with caution, knowing that it may not be representative.

After gathering the data, the students presented their report to the TCSHI board. Representatives from V. R. and the public school

for the deaf also were present. Table 1 describes the major findings for each market segment. Hearing respondents provided more information than the members of the deaf groups, either because of greater needs or, more likely, because of greater ease in articulation.

**TABLE 1**  
**MARKET SEGMENT FINDINGS**

Segment	Number of Respondents	Findings
Deaf parents	16 families (Only one family had deaf children.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parents want their children to fully develop communication skills — oral and sign.</li> <li>2. Parents want their children to receive "total communication" training. The CSPD staff recognized this as a need for interpreter training.</li> </ol>
Hearing parents	22 parents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sixty percent reported oral speech as the primary communication means at home.</li> <li>2. Few parents have attended sign language class, but they see a need to attend.</li> <li>3. Parents want to learn more about problems of deaf children.</li> <li>4. Parents want to meet as a group to hear guest speakers discuss similar interests.</li> <li>5. Children need more social activities, better speech training, and job placement assistance.</li> <li>6. Parents of younger children need specially-trained baby-sitters and a child care center.</li> <li>7. Only half of the parents had heard of CSPD before the survey.</li> </ol>
Deaf Employees	11 employees (7 male and 4 female, ages 35-59)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employees did not feel discriminated against because of deafness.</li> <li>2. Help is needed in completing tax forms, vocational counseling, and job training.</li> </ol>

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TABLE 1 (Cont.)

Employers of deaf employees	10 supervisors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deaf employees offer strong characteristics of positive attitude, stability, and conscientiousness.</li> <li>2. The most serious problem is communication.</li> <li>3. Employers most often communicate in writing, followed by oral speech and signs.</li> <li>4. Sign language classes are needed to train interpreters within the firms.</li> <li>5. Half of the employers had had some previous experience with deaf persons.</li> <li>6. Interpreter services are especially needed on the first day of work and during training periods.</li> </ol>
Employers in general	30 companies (personnel directors)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Six of the firms (20%) had at least one deaf employee; all except one employee were bluecollar workers.</li> <li>2. All except two firms had heard of Vocational Rehabilitation. Only one had heard of CSPD.</li> <li>3. Nineteen (of twenty-three) firms anticipated problems in hiring the deaf.</li> <li>4. The main perceived problems were communications and safety.</li> <li>5. Most jobs were defined as requiring lip reading.</li> <li>6. The most needed service was information on availability of deaf workers and their abilities and limitations.</li> </ol>
Deaf senior citizens	15 persons (ages 62-91)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This group didn't believe that it had any serious problems or unmet needs.</li> <li>2. Counseling is needed on how to resolve problems with Social Security and finances.</li> <li>3. The greatest need is for recreation, and field trips would be nice.</li> <li>4. They want large meeting rooms, a small kitchen, and vending machines.</li> </ol>

At this point, it is important that the center director not feel that that project is over, but that the work is just beginning. The instructor should function as a consultant for the remaining steps to assure that the findings are acted upon.

### IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVES

An analysis of the survey findings identified a list of services that CSPD could consider offering. This list appears in Table 2. The services needed by the deaf parents and the senior citizens came as no surprise,

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as these two groups had been the primary recipients of CSPD service in the past. CSPD had made no real efforts to interface with the employers of deaf persons and had no premonitions of what to expect. The two groups providing the most enlightening information were the hearing parents and employers in general. The response by the employers verified a need for an education program aimed at overcoming fears and achieving greater understanding — a public relations campaign. The hearing parents represented a much smaller group with a lengthy list of needs for both themselves and their children that CSPD could consider.

**TABLE 2**  
**POSSIBLE CSPD SERVICES**

Market Segment	Services
Deaf parents	Interpreter training for hearing children
Hearing parents	Information on CSPD services Informative publications Parents club Guest speakers Social activities for children Speech training for children Job placement assistance for children Specially-trained babysitters Child care center
Deaf employees and their employers	Interpreter training for company interpreters Counseling in completing tax forms Vocational counseling Training assistance (interpreter) Orientation assistance (interpreter)
Employers in general	Information on services available from CSPD Assistance in locating deaf workers Assistance in integrating deaf workers into the organization
Deaf senior citizens	Interpreting services Counseling services relating mainly to social security and finances Recreation (games, field trips) Large meeting rooms, small kitchen, and vending machines

Now that CSPD better understood the needs of five target market segments in the county, decisions had to be made about which needs, if any, to meet. The systems approach is intended to facilitate this decision-making by encouraging an evaluation of all feasible alternatives. The task of CSPD

was to screen the complete list of needed services and identify those that should receive further consideration.

### EVALUATE ALTERNATIVES

When a firm evaluates a target market need, attention is given to competitors who also seek that business. Most firms try not to meet competition head-on and prefer a market where a monopoly can be enjoyed. A service center with limited resources takes somewhat the same stance — if another organization is offering the services, there is no need to duplicate them. As CSPD considered the list of needs in Table 2, it was apparent that several of the services could be obtained elsewhere.

Guest speakers could be provided to the hearing parents by P. T. A. groups within the county. Social activities for children could be provided by a youth club formed by TCHI. Speech training for children could be provided by the T. C. U. Speech and Hearing Clinic and the Easter Seal Society. Job placement service for children could be handled by the deaf education program in the technical high school and the V. R. vocational counseling and training and orientation assistance could be furnished to deaf employees by the V. R. Assistance to employers in locating deaf workers, likewise, could be performed by V. R.

In addition to needlessly duplicating services offered by other institutions, the service center must be aware of its own resource limitations. A staff of four full-time professionals (director, counselor, interpreter coordinator, and secretary/receptionist) could hardly provide all of the remaining services.

It was decided to provide interpreter training for children of deaf parents only when the children were adults, interested in free-lance interpreting. Also, no effort was to be made to provide specially trained babysitters or a child care center until a definite need for such services were shown. Very often, respondents to a survey will identify something as a need when it is not. CSPD decided that such might have been the case with this "need". Resources simply did not permit consideration of these services.



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### SELECT THE BEST ALTERNATIVE

Different methods can be used to select the best alternative — the best mix of services. Using the information from the study as a starting point, CSPD deleted any services being offered by other agencies, and also any services for which a real need had not been proven. The remaining services represented a mix that the management believed could be supplied in a quality manner with the available staff. The mix appears in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
**THE SELECTED SERVICE MIX**

Market Segment	Services
Deaf parents	Interpreter training for hearing children
Hearing parents	Information on CSPD services Informative publications Parents club
Deaf employees and their employers	Interpreter training for company interpreters Counseling in completing tax forms
Employers in general	Information on services available from CSPD Assistance in integrating deaf workers into the organization
Deaf senior citizens	Interpreting services Counseling services relating mainly to Social Security and finances Recreation (games, field trips) Large meeting rooms, small kitchen, and vending machines

### IMPLEMENT THE SOLUTION AND FOLLOW-UP

During the time that has elapsed since the study, CSPD has adjusted its service mix in response to changing needs and resources. The services provided have been determined both by needs and available funds.

The center has provided an orientation service to adult children of deaf parents, to assist the young adults in deciding whether to offer interpreting service on a free-lance basis. The center regularly provides interpreters to the parents. Hearing parents have received information on CSPD services about once every other year when a staff member addresses the parents group. A resource library on deafness is maintained within space

and funds restrictions as another information source and a meeting room was included in the design of the new building to provide space for groups, such as the parents, to have meetings and programs.

CSPD never had adequate staff to provide interpreter training for employers. Consequently, V. R. and Tarrant County Junior College (T. C. J. C.) have provided the service. One of the senior citizens couples (the wife is a retired bookkeeper) have provided tax counseling on routine matters and have referred more complex problems to tax specialists outside of CSPD. Interpreters are furnished for meetings with the specialists.

In November 1979, CSPD initiated Project Career Orientation Training (COT) when Federal funds permitted the addition of two full-time staff members. These members work with employers and employees alike in developing job opportunities, placing applicants, and in preparing deaf adults to cope with the demands of employment. The COT staff has provided the needed information flow between CSPD and employers.

The senior citizens have continued to be the recipients of the most consistent service program, although reduced state funding has prohibited recruiting of new members. A games program was initiated, but interest waned and it has been dropped. Interpreting services are offered, as are counseling services relating mainly to Social Security and finances. A full-time counselor has been employed since 1977 and, at one time, funds were available to hire two of the senior citizens for part-time counseling. Facilities have been made available in the new building (residential-type kitchen, vending machine, and meeting room) for senior citizen use.

### CONCLUSIONS

To CSPD, the significance of the research was the information obtained. Management learned which services were needed and was able to concentrate resources to provide them. To other centers considering a similar approach, the significance is the manner in which the information was gathered. A local

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college class conducted the study at no "out of pocket" cost to the center. Other centers could take advantage of similar resources by contacting the local college's marketing department (in the school of business).

But, success will not be automatic unless several key ingredients are present. Most importantly, the center leadership must be committed to the project — they must be sufficiently interested to read the report, consider the recommendations, and implement the selected service mix. Practically anyone is agreeable to authorizing a study; acting on its findings is another matter. In this respect, the study is not "free". Center personnel must invest their time both during and after the study period.

Another key ingredient is a good working relationship between the center director and the class instructor. They must communicate and cooperate, each furnishing his own specialized skills. The instructor must learn the basics about deafness and needs of deaf persons. The director must become amenable to applying the systematic logic of business planning and execution.

Cooperation must exist at the data-gathering level as well. The students and the center's interpreters must work together as a

team. Interpreters should be assigned to each student group before work actually begins. The interpreter should participate in each interview session.

Theoretically, every community service center for the deaf could benefit from a well-conducted survey of consumer needs. Realistically, many of the smaller centers would have difficulty in implementing the recommendations due to lack of resources. There is a point in the life cycle of a service center when such a study becomes practical — when a full-time staff has been assembled and there is a question about how that staff should be utilized. At that point, an investment of staff time in participating in a survey of market needs would be a sound investment. With a long-term plan firmly grounded to target market needs, a service center has taken the first step in applying business methods to improve efficiency in operation.

Readers interested in receiving copies of the survey questionnaires may receive a copy by writing to the author.

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